



For immediate release

5 April 2021

**TOWARDS ERADICATION ON MINE RISK AWARENESS DAY: PROJECT MASAM LAUNCHES
NEW CAMPAIGN IN YEMEN**

5 April 2021 - On Sunday 4th April, the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, humanitarian mine clearance programme Project Masam launched a new campaign in Yemen to raise awareness of the threat caused by landmines and explosive remnants of war.

Since 2015, Yemen's Houthi militia, have and are still routinely employing landmines directly against civilians - extensively, intentionally and indiscriminately. Deployed offensively, landmines are sowed to depopulate areas. Terrorised civilian populations are forced to leave their cities and villages, agricultural land and schools. They disrupt the transport of goods, medical supplies and aid; further deepening the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Since the programme was launched in June 2018, Project Masam's 32 demining teams and five rapid response teams have cleared and destroyed a staggering 230,592 landmines, unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices (as at 2 April 2021).

The new campaign was launched by Retief Horn, Operations Officer Project Masam Yemen. Addressing attendees in Marib on Sunday, Mr Horn said in a speech:

"Over the past three years, we have shared a common goal: to reduce and eliminate new victims of landmines, stabilise Yemen, and help Yemen heal, rebuild and prosper.

"Six years into an armed conflict that has killed over 18,400 civilians, Yemenis also face the threat of explosive devices planted by Al Houthi - against international humanitarian law treaty law, Mine Ban Treaty and in violation of laws-of-war.

"Since the beginning of the conflict, we estimate some 10,000 Yemenis have been injured, maimed and killed by mines. These shocking and revolting numbers are sadly the reason we do what we do. They are also the drive our brave teams have to face the world's most dangerous job, every day.

"As you know, this work would be impossible without the help and support of local officials, and communities across liberated areas. Without these trusting relations, Project Masam would not be able to locate these deadly and illegal weapons. This is why Project Masam is today launching a new awareness campaign across several localities."

Across nine governorates, Project Masam is carrying out a Public Awareness Poster Campaign, addressing several critical issues and sharing the following messages targeted to the local population: Avoid touching any foreign object you might find in your farm, house or track. Report any foreign object or concern to Project Masam immediately. Do not store explosive devices in your home. Protect the lives of your countrymen.

On countless occasions, Project Masam teams have unfortunately witnessed civilians stockpiling landmines and other explosive devices in their homes, as a booty of war. Amid the humanitarian crisis, landmines can be sold on so-called "weapons markets". In Marib's gun market, a landmine sells for an average YER 5,000 - the equivalent of GBP 14.5, or USD 19.9. While Project Masam worked with local authorities to implement an order under which landmines found in homes and gun markets would be immediately confiscated and destroyed, the issue of civilians' landmine stockpiling is still alarming.

Mr Horn told attendees: "We hope that this new awareness campaign will help contribute to a reduction in mine victims, and a high pace destruction of these explosive devices."

This poster campaign is supported by daily activities carried out by Project Masam demining teams, who already work with local communities by raising awareness of the ongoing threat posed by mines across villages and towns. As part of their daily public awareness initiatives, staff hand out flyers with simple safety messages and encourage civilians to report dangerous items to Project Masam's free hotline number.

"As the world today observes International Mine Awareness Day, I would like to reflect on the work Project Masam's 32 teams are doing across nine governorates: Marib, Al Jawf, Shabwah, Al Bayda, Al Dhaleh, Lahj, Ta'iz and Al Hodeydah.

Mr Horn also expressed gratitude towards the generous support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre, Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre (YEMAC) and the Governor of Marib Sheikh Sultan al-Arada - without which none of Project Masam's work would be possible.

"Funding for the largest demining project in Yemen means that our staff are cared for, offered constant training and refreshers, and are able to operate in the safest possible conditions," Mr Horn said.

"As the world today observes International Mine Awareness Day, our special recognition goes to all mine action personnel, in particular to every Project Masam demining team and staff. Since the project began in June 2018, Project Masam lost 23 staff in the field. 28 were wounded.

"So, let's take a moment now to honour these brave men, and honour their families and colleagues. Let us take a moment to thank the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre. Let us take a moment to thank each and every one of you for your support. Let us take a moment to pray for peace in Yemen - a stable and healed Yemen, a Yemen free from mines."

Project Masam Managing Director, Ousama Algosaibi, added: "We know the risks of mine action but at the end you are actually doing something good. You are helping other people live a decent, safe life in Yemen."

Note to editors

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About Project Masam

To enhance the security measures in the region and ensure Yemen can rebuild and find stability, the Saudi Project for Landmine Clearance (Masam) mine project was launched in December 2017, in agreement with the Yemeni government.

Training and operations commenced months later, with the first team entering Yemen in February 2018. Project Masam currently has 32 teams working in liberated areas across the country and conducts humanitarian clearance in accordance with priorities set by the Yemeni National Authority.

Project Masam trains, equips and supervises over 450 Yemeni nationals. These include administration, logistics and security support staff, who are supported by experienced technical mentors.

The efforts have already created safe spaces to allow basic humanitarian and reconstruction activities to proceed safely and without fear.

Masam does not work on active fronts, and only operates in areas where it has access to, safely.

Since the beginning of the programme, Project Masam has successfully cleared 21,914,929sqm of land, locating and destroying:

- 3,284 anti-personal mines
- 65,657 anti-tank mines
- 155,726 unexploded ordnances
- 5,925 improvised explosive devices (as at 2 April 2021)

Project Masam's work is conducted under the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief), as part of KSRelief's efforts to support landmine victims.

The organisation funds centres that cater for the treatment of injured Yemenis. These centres provide free services to amputees, provide prosthetic rehabilitation support and focus on the rehabilitation of former child soldiers across the country.

About landmine violence

Landmines have plagued Yemen since the 1960s. More recently, Houthi forces' widespread use of landmines across Yemen since 2015 has killed and injured thousands of civilians and prevented aid organisations from reaching vulnerable communities.

During the course of the current war, the Houthis have planted landmines and explosive devices disguised as rocks, pens and children's toys in villages, farmlands, schools, roads and parks. With an estimated 1 million-plus landmines dispersed and counting, Yemen is the most mined nation since World War II. There is no official mapping of the mines' location. At times, mines have been laid by hand often with no discernible pattern or record.

Whilst comprehensive landmine casualty figures are being collected across different governorates, this data is not centralised and thus the exact number of casualties cannot be verified across the country. It is apparent, however, that mines have caused more casualties than the fighting, with landmine victims being mainly children and women.

According to a human rights report published on 4th April by the National Organisation for Defending Rights and Freedoms 'HOOD' (Sheba team), the Shahed Organisation for Rights and Development, and the Yemen Rights Organisation for Rights and Development, 6,717 violations committed by the Houthi group against civilians in 17 Yemeni governorates have been monitored during between July 2014 and March 2021.

The experts established that 5,026 civilians were killed or wounded in 17 governorates as a result of the explosion of mines, IEDs, and unexploded ordnance. Among the victims were 958 children, 332 women and 1,940 elderly people.

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